

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

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INFO USINFO WASHDC

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AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USMISSION GENEVA

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

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SUBJECT: MALAYSIAN EDITORIAL ON TANKER SAFETY AND STRAITS OF
MALACCA

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 2363 (NOTAL) (B) KUALA LUMPUR 1920

(NOTAL) C) 77 STATE 296444

1. SUMMARY: MALAYSIAN BUSINESS TIMES (MARCH 24) FRONT-PAGED
AN EDITORIAL SPELLING THE URGENCY OF ENFORCING SAFETY
MEASURES FOR MALACCA STRAITS IN LIGHT OF LESSON LEARNED
FROM CURRENT AMOCO-CADIZ OIL SPILL ALONG BRITTANY COAST.
WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING INEVITABILITY OF OIL AND RELATED
PRICE INCREASES DUE TO HIGH COST OF INSTALLING SAFETY
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EQUIPMENT, ARTICLE WARNS THAT ECONOLOGICAL DISASTERS ARE OF
EVEN GREATER CONCERN TO LITTORAL STATES. ARTICLE FURTHER
CHIDES TOKYO FOR "DILLY-DALLYING" IN ITS ENDORSEMENT
OF SAFETY MEASURES PROPOSED BY ASEAN LITTORAL STATES
(REF A). END SUMMARY.

2. BEGIN TEXT: THE OIL SPEWING OUT ALONG THE BRITTANY

COAST FROM THE DISASTER-STRICKEN AMOCO-CADIZ BRINGS HOME ONCE AGAIN THE DANGER THAT LITTORAL STATES FACE FROM ACCIDENTS TO TANKERS PLYING NEAR THEIR SHORES. IT IS A WORLDWIDE PROBLEM AND NEEDS TO BE TACKLED ON A GLOBAL BASIS. THE COST OF SAFETY MEASURES WILL HAVE TO BE SHARED, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, BY ALL NATIONS IN THE FORM OF HIGHER COSTS OF OIL AND THE IMPACT THIS WILL HAVE ON OTHER PRICES. THE THREE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ADJOINING THE STRAITS OF MALACCA ARE AS CONCERNED ABOUT THE BURDEN OF HIGHER COSTS AS ANYONE ELSE, BUT THEY MUST NEVERTHELESS PRESS ON WITH SAFETY MEASURES AGREED UPON IN LONDON WITH THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME COMMUNITY LAST NOVEMBER FOR REGULATING TRAFFIC PASSING THROUGH THE WATERWAY TO SAFEGUARD THEIR ECOLOGY FROM THE HAZARDS OF OIL SPILLS.

3. ALTHOUGH THE BROAD OUTLINES OF NEW SAFETY REGIME FOR THE STRAITS HAVE BEEN SETTLED, THE DETAILS REMAIN TO BE WORKED OUT. THE LITTORAL STATES DO NOT WISH TO ACT ARBITRARILY; THEY ARE CONSULTING WITH THE BIGGEST USER, JAPAN, TO ENSURE THAT NO UNDUE HARDSHIP IS CAUSED TO IT. TOKYO'S RESPONSE TO THIS HAS BEEN, TO SAY THE LEAST, AMBIVALENT. IT AGREED TO THE MAIN STIPULATIONS AT THE LONDON CONSULTATIONS, BUT NOW SEEKS TO HAVE THESE HELD IN ABEYANCE TO ALLOW MORE TIME TO ADJUST THE SHIPPING PATTERN. JAPAN'S CONCERN FOR CUTTING COSTS OF THE CHANGEOVER IS UNDERSTANDABLE, BUT SHOULD LITTORAL

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STATES WAIT ON THIS ACCOUNT? FRANCE'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE AMOCO-CADIZ SPILL, THE BIGGEST ON RECORD, SUGGESTS THAT DITHERING WITH SAFETY CAN INFLICT INTOLERABLE DAMAGE.

4. IN THE BROADER WORLD CONTEXT, THE LESSON UNDERLINED BY THE LATEST DISASTER IS THAT THE SAFETY MEASURES WORKED OUT IN FEBRUARY FOR TANKERS SHOULD BEGIN TO BE ENFORCED AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE. AMONG THESE THERE ARE TWO OF DIRECT RELEVANCE TO TRAFFIC CONDITIONS IN THE STRAITS OF MALACCA. ONE REQUIRES HEAVIER TANKERS TO HAVE TWO SETS OF RADAR, EACH OPERATING INDEPENDENTLY SO THAT THE ACCIDENT-AL FAILURE OR MALFUNCTIONING OF ONE CAN BE OFFSET BY THE OTHER. THE SECOND REQUIRES DUPLICATE STEERING SYSTEMS FOR MUCH THE SAME REASONS. IN NARROW WATERS LIKE THE STRAITS, THERE IS PARTICULAR NEED FOR SUCH FOOL-PROOF ARRANGEMTS OF THIS KIND. BUT GIVEN THE LONG-DRAWN OUT PROCEDURES FOR RATIFICATION OF SAFETY CONVENTIONS, IT MAY WELL TAKE MANY MONTHS IF NOT YEARS, TO SECURE GENERAL COMPLIANCE, EVEN THOUGH DISASTERS MAY CONTINUE TO MULTIPLY.

5. THE ASEAN LITTORAL STATES ARE NOT OBVIOUSLY IN A POSITION TO ENFORCE SAFETY UNILATERALLY AS THE UNITED STATES PROPOSES TO DO. ITS ADMINISTRATION HAS ALREADY SERVED NOTICE THAT UNLESS FOREIGN FLAG CARRIERS FALL IN LINE WITH U.S. SAFETY STANDARDS, THEY MAY BE BARRED FROM ENTERING MAERICAN COASTAL WATERS. FRANCE, WISER AFTER THE EVENT, IS PROPOSING TO DISALLOW TANKERS WITHIN 12 MILES OF ITS SHORES. ASEAN COUNTRIES CAN ILL AFFORD TO FOLLOW THESE EXAMPLES, AND WOULD RATHER GO AHEAD WITH THE AGREEMENT OF JAPAN UNLESS ITS DILLY-DALLYING FORCES THEM TO CHOOSE OTHERWISE. EN TEXT.

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